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SENATE Public Health
John Wilkinson 4
4/3/13 Date 4-3-2013
Bill No. HJ 16

Support HJ 16 "...INTERIM STUDY OF STATE-OPERATED PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS SERVING INDIVIDUALS WITH MENTAL ILLNESS, INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES, AND CHEMICAL DEPENDENCY"

My youngest son has been in the Forensic Unit at Montana State Hospital since December 2010, over 2 years ago. He was committed there after pleading guilty to 3 felonies. The court determined that he was unable to appreciate the criminality of his offenses due to his mental illness, and because the court found him to be "Guilty But Mentally Ill" he is serving his sentence in the Warm Springs Forensic Unit.

He is 26 years old and has been afflicted with a Serious Mental Illness, Shizo-affective disorder, since he was 16. Up until then he played football and wrestled at Capital High School, was a member of the Helena Civil Air Patrol, had plenty of friends, and was a "B" student. However, his mental illness was serious enough he was unable to attend school his Junior Year, and he had to be "home schooled" by the school district.

His mother and I looked everywhere to find help. He had 4 suicide attempts, but was never in trouble with the law until, after turning 24, he experienced a psychotic break that was so severe that he seriously injured 2 people including a sheriff's deputy as he truly believed they were going to seriously harm him. It is just not possible to describe the nearly impossible difficulties of trying to navigate our mental health system, and your own child is totally incapacitated by a serious mental illness. In the 2 years and 3 months since our son has been a patient at the MSH, his mother and I have visited him virtually every week. March 10th marked our 116th, 142 mile round trip to Montana State Hospital's forensic unit.

When weighing the merits of HJ 16 considering the following with respect to Guilty But Mentally Ill patients/offenders in Montana State Hospital's Forensics Unit:

- The state of Montana will have "invested" over \$475,000 in my son's care and treatment by the time he is "paroled" to a community based treatment program.
- Montana State Hospital's cost per day was \$580 in FY 12¹. The reported average length of stay for the 27 Guilty But Mentally Ill patients/offenders at MSH was 505 days² at a cost of over \$7.9 million in state general fund dollars.
- Patients released from the Forensic Unit experienced a 60% recidivism rate.

As the father of a son with a serious mental illness I strongly support HJ 16's purposes, namely to "study state-operated facilities that serve individuals with mental illness,

¹ Montana Legislative Fiscal Division. 2015 Biennium Budget Analysis. P. B-192

² 10/1/12 email re: GBMI information for Montana State Hospital from Connie Worl, Montana State Hospital to John Wilkinson

intellectual disabilities, and chemical dependency to determine if changes to the current system of facilities could:

- (a) provide more effective treatment; and
- (b) serve individuals in a more cost-effective manner

As a Montana tax payer, and as the father of one of our seriously mentally ill citizens, I urge you to support studying how we can better protect our very significant mental health treatment "investments" and more cost effectively transition our seriously mentally ill citizens back to their communities.